HOME

A Story of Today and of All Days

By
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SYNOPSIS.

—5—

Alan Wayne is sent away from Red Hill, his home, by his uncle, J. Y., as a moral failure. Clem runs after him in a tangle of short skirts to bid him good-by. Captain Wayne tells Alan of the failing of the Waynes. Clem drinks Alan's health on his birthday. Judge Healey buys a picture for Alix Lansing. The judge defends Alan in his business with his employers. Alan and Alix meet at sea, homeward bound, and start a flirtation which becomes serious. At home, Nance Sterling asks Alan to go away from Alix. Alix is taken to task by Gerry, her husband, for her conduct with Alan and defies him. Gerry, as he thinks, sees Alix and Alan eloping, drops everything, and goes to Pernambuco. Alix leaves Alan on the train and goes home to find that Gerry has disappeared. Gerry leaves Pernambuco and goes to Piranhas. On a canoe trip he meets a native girl. The judge fails to trace Gerry. A baby is born to Alix. The native girl takes Gerry to her home.

CHAPTER X—Continued.

She pointed to the house and then to herself and smiled. He understood the pantomime and nodded. When they reached the house a withered and wrinkled little woman came out to the arched veranda to meet them. She looked Gerry over shrewdly and then held out her hand. He shook it listlessly. They walked through a long dividing hall. On each side were large rooms, empty, save one where a big bed, a wash-stand, and an old bureau with mildewed glass, were grouped like an oasis in a desert. They reached the kitchen. It was evidently the living room of the house. A hammock cut off one corner. Chairs were drawn up to a rough, uncovered table. A stove was built into the masonry and a cavernous oven gaped from the massive wall.

At the stove was an old negress, making coffee with shaky deliberation. On the floor sat an old darky clad only from his waist down in such trousers as Gerry was wearing, except that they were soiled and tattered. He looked up and fastened his eyes on Gerry and then struggled to his feet. Dim recollections of some bygone white master brought a gleam into his bleary eyes. He raised his hand in the national gesture of child to parent, slave to master. "Blessing, master, blessing." Gerry had learned the meaning of the quaint custom. "God bless thee," he answered in badly jumbled Portuguese. The girl and the wrinkled woman looked at him, surprised, and then smiled at each other as women smile at the first steps of a child.

They made him sit down at the table and placed before him crisp rusks of manioc flour and steaming coffee whose splendid aroma triumphed over the sordidness of the scene and through the nostrils reached the palate with anticipatory touch. It was sweetened with dark, pungent sirup and was served black in a capacious bowl, as though one could not drink too deeply of the elixir of life.

Gerry ate ravenously and sipped the coffee, at first sparingly, then greedily. The old negress fluttered nervously about the stove, nursing its inadequate fire of charcoal. Her eyes were big with wonder at the capacity of the white master. The old negro had sunk back to his seat on the floor. The two white women stood and watched Gerry. The more he ate the more they urged.

Gerry set down the empty bowl with a sigh. The rusks had been delicious. Before the coffee the name of nectar dwindled to impotency. Its elixir rioted in his veins. At the sigh the girl had deftly rolled a cigarette in a bit of corn husk, scraped thin as paper. Now she slipped it into his fingers. The old negress picked up a live coal and, passing it from shaky hand to shaky hand, deposited it on his plate. Gerry lit the cigarette. With the first long contented whiff he smiled. The smile brought stinging recollection. With a frown he threw away the cigarette and rose from the table. "The brute is fed and laughs," he said aloud and strode from the room. The girl and the little wrinkled woman looked at each other in dismay. They seemed to sense the unintelligible words. The old darky crawled across the floor and possessed himself of the cigarette.

Gerry went to seat himself on the steps of the veranda. Before him stretched the fallow valley, beyond it gleamed the black line of the rushing river. To the right were the ruins of a sugar mill and stables. To the left the debris that once had been slaves' quarters. The fields still bore the hummocks, in rough alignment, that told the story of past years fruitful in cane. All was waste, all was ruin.

The girl slipped to a seat beside him. She rolled a fresh cigarette and then shyly laid a small brown hand on his arm. Gerry looked at her. Her big brown eyes were sorrowful and pleading. She held out the cigarette with a little shrug that deprecated the smallness of the offering.

Gerry felt a twinge of remorse. He patted the hand that lay on his arm, smiled, and took the cigarette. The girl's face lit up. She called and again the negress brought fire. This time Gerry smoked gravely. The girl sat on beside him. Her hand lay in his.

So they sat until the sun passed the zenith and, slipping over the eaves, fell like fire on their bare feet. Gerry stood up, pointed to himself and then down the river to the town. The girl shook her head. She made him understand that he was cut off from the town by an impassable tributary to the great river—that he would have to make a long detour inland. Then she swept her hand from the sun to the horizon to show him that the day was too far gone for the journey.

He was not much concerned. An apathy seized him at the thought of going back. He felt as though shame had left some visible scar on his countenance that men must see and read. As he stood, thoughtful and detached, the girl grasped his arm with both her hands and drew his attention to her. Then she gave one sweep of her arm that embraced all the ruin of house and mill and fields. She pointed to herself. He understood: these things were hers. Then she folded her hands and with a gesture of surrender laid them in his.

It was eloquent. There was no mistaking her meaning. Gerry was touched. He held both her clasped hands in one of his and put his arm around her shoulders. She fixed her eyes on his face for the answer. Once more Gerry's eyes wandered over all that ruin. After all, he thought, why not? Why not bury his own ruin here in company? But she read no decision in his face though she watched it long. What she saw was debate and for the time it satisfied her.

Gerry all that afternoon was very silent and thoughtful—silent because there was no one he could talk to, thoughtful because the idea the girl had put into his head was taking shape, aided by a long chain of circumstances. He looked back over his covered trail. If he had been some shrewd fugitive from justice he could not have planned it better. His sudden flight without visiting his home, his faiure to buy a ticket, the subornation of the purser with its assurance of silence as to his presence or destination, all that had been wiped out by his cablegram to his mother. But then fate had stepped in again and once more blotted out the trail. Some genius had heard his wish. The old Gerry Lansing was dead. Even from himself the old Gerry Lansing had been torn away in a chariot of fire.

In the cool of the evening he looked about him. The tiny world into which he had fallen was penurious but self-contained. Such fabrics as there were, were homespun from the bolls of a scraggy patch of cotton bushes. A little oil in a clay dish with a twisted wick of cotton giving forth more smoke than light seemed to fix him in his setting of prehistoric man. The rice, gathered from an enduring bottom, formed with manioc, the backbone of the household's sustenance. From the outcrops of the abandoned cane fields, with the assistance of an antediluvian hand-mill and an equally antiquated iron pot, they made the black sirup that served for sugar. Salt, slightly alkaline, was plentiful. A few cows and their progeny lived in the open and lived well, for, even untilled, the lands of the valley were rich. An occasional member of the herd was carried off to market by the old darky. The proceeds bought the very few contributions of civilization necessary to the upkeep of the lenten life.

Gerry decided. He looked at the girl and she ran to him. He put his arms around her and gazed with a sort of numbed emotion into her great dark eyes. Those eyes were wells of simplicity, love, fidelity, but below all that there were depths unmeasured and unmeasuring that gave all and demanded all.

In the mind of the husband who believed himself deserted and betrayed there no longer existed any barrier between him and this woman who had come so strangely into his life. Marriage with her was no wrong to Alix. The last scruples of civilization and of law fell from him like a garment thrown aside and he became the husband of the girl who had so innocently wooed him.

CHAPTER XI

Collingeford gave a sigh of relief when he saw what manner of place was Maple House. As they gathered around the great table for dinner he was the only stranger and he did not feel it. Nance was there with the faint smile of a mother that has just put her children to bed. Charley Stirling, teasing Clematis, tried to forget that Monday and the city were coming together. Mrs. J. Y., with Collingeford on her right and the judge on her left, held quiet sway over the table and nodded reassuringly at the old captain who was making gestures with his eyes to the effect that a whisky and soda should be immediately offered to the guest. J. Y., pretty gray by now, sat thoughtful, but kindly, at the other end of the table. Clem was beside him.

It was not until the men were sitting alone after the glass of port, in which all had drunk Collingeford's welcome to that house, that the judge said casually, "Collingeford saw Alan in Africa."

"Eh! What?" said the captain aroused to sudden interest. "What's that about Alan?"

"I ran across Alan Wayne in Africa," said Collingeford, smiling. "Do you want me to tell you about it?"

Nance called Charley Stirling out. "You shirker," she said, "come and sit with me in the hammock."

"Collingeford was just going to tell about meeting Alan in Africa," said Charley indignantly. And then Nance said "Oh!" and wanted to send him back but he wouldn't go.

"Yes," grunted the captain in reply to Collingeford's question and J. Y. nodded as he caught the young man's eye. "Wish you would," he said and leaned forward, his elbows on the table.

Collingeford was one of those men who are sensitive to men. His vocabulary did not run to piffle but he loved an understanding ear. He looked at the judge's keen but restful face, at the captain's glaring eyes, which somehow had assumed a kindly glint, at J. Y.'s rugged figure, suddenly grown tense, and he knew that Alan Wayne was near to the hearts of these three. He fingered his wine glass. "If I was one of those men," he began, looking at nobody, "who dislike Ten Percent Wayne I wouldn't tell you about him. But I'm not. It took me only two hours to get over hating him and those two hours were spent in a broiling sun at the wrong end of a half-finished bridge.

"Prince Bodsky and I were on shikari. We were headed home after a long and unsuccessful shoot in new country and we were as sore and tired and bored with the life of the wild as two old-timers ever get. On the day I'm telling you about we were trekking up a river gorge to a crossing. After lunch and the long rest we still had ten miles to go to cross and it didn't help things to know that once over we had to come straight back on the other side. During the first hour's march in the afternoon we heard the strangest sound that ever those wilds gave forth. It was like hammering on steel but we refused to believe our ears until a sudden curve brought us bang up against the indisputable fact of a girder-bridge in the throes of construction. Before the thought of the sacrilege to the game country—before we could see in this noisy monstrosity the root of our recent bad luck—came the glad thought that we didn't have to do ten miles up that gorge and ten back. We would have whooped except that men don't whoop in Africa—it scares the game.

"I said the bridge was in the throes of construction. It was just that. Its two long girders, reaching from brink to brink, with their spidery trusses hanging underneath, fairly swarmed with sweating figures, and the figures were black. It was that that brought us to a full stop and just when our eyes were fixed with the intensity of discovery, one of the workers looked up, saw us, relaxed and gave the loud grunt which stands in Landin for 'Just look at that!' in English.

"The babbling and hammering around him ceased, but while he still stared at us, we saw a veritable apparition. A white man, hung between heaven and the depths of the gorge, was racing along the top of the slippery girder. His helmet blew off, hung poised, and then plunged in long tackling sweeps. The man was dressed in a cotton shirt, white trousers and thick woolen socks. No boots. Of course, I didn't notice all that till afterwards. In his hand he carried a sjambok. Suddenly the staring darky seemed to feel him coming but, before he could turn, the sjambok quirt came down with the clinging sting of hide on flesh. We saw the blood spurt. The negro toppled without a cry. He fell inside, caught on a truss, clung, and finally with a struggle drew himself up on to a stringer. A shout of laughter went up from his fellows. Bodsky and I had heard it often—the laugh of the African for his brother in pain. And then they fell to work again. The black with the blood trickling off his back rested long enough to get his breath and then climbed back to his place on the girder. He was grinning. Don't ask me to explain it. Men have died trying to explain Africa.

"The white man had stopped and half turned. He stood, a little straddling, on the girder, and switched the sjambok to and fro. His eyes were blazing. From his lips dropped a patter of all the vile words in Landin, Swahili and a half a dozen other dialects—the words that a white man learns first if he listens to natives. The jargon seemed to incite the blacks. They worked as clumsily as ever but harder. They started to sing, as the African does when he's getting up a special burst of speed. Then the white man walked off the girder on our side, out of the way. 'Now's our time,' I whispered to Bodsky. He shook his head slowly from side to side but I was already under way. I walked up to the white man and asked him if he could let us across. He glanced around as if he hadn't seen our outfit till that moment and then he looked me square in the eyes. 'We knock off at six,' he said, and that was all.

"I turned back. I'd been angry before but never as angry as that. Bodsky was already getting up the fly of a tent. 'I saw it coming,' he said with his quiet little laugh that you never hear when there's anything to laugh at. 'Look here, Bodsky,' I said, 'let's walk to the old crossing.' And he answered, 'My dear chap, I'm going to sit right here. I wouldn't miss this for a shot at elephant. That man is Ten Percent Wayne.'

"'Where'd you meet him?' I asked.

"'Never met him,' said Bodsky, 'but I've heard of him.' So had I. We sat down together under the fly on a couple of loads and propped two whiskies-and-warm-water on another load in front of us and watched Wayne while Wayne watched his men.

"'Suppose we offer him a drink,' I said and ran the sweat off my eyebrows with my finger.

"Bodsky looked at me pityingly. 'So you want to get burned again. Does that man look to you as though he was thinking about a drink? Well, let me tell you he isn't. Every bit of him is thinking about that bridge every minute. God! I haven't seen men driven like that since I was a boy. Once more there's something new in Africa! And I've never seen a man drive himself like that, anywhere.' All the Mongolian and Tatar that is said to lurk in every Russian seemed to be leaking out of Bodsky's narrowed eyes.

"We sat there and drank and smoked and sweated, and I sulked. Every once in a while Bodsky would say something. First it was: 'Those boys are from the South. Must have brought them with him.' Then it was: 'He knows something about the sun. He keeps his head in the shade-spot from that lonely palm.' And finally: 'Collingeford, I never despised your intellect before. What are you sulking for? Can't you see what's up? Can't you understand that if a man will stand for two hours shifting an inch at a time with the shade rather than disturb half a dozen niggers at work to go and get a helmet he isn't going to call those niggers off to let a couple of loafers like us crawl across his girders? What you and I are staring at is just plain common garden work with a capital W, stark naked and ugly, but it's great.'

"And right there I saw the light. To us two the mystery of Ten Percent Wayne was revealed. He could drive men. He could make bricks without straw. While work was on, nothing else mattered. Right and wrong were measured by the needs of that bridge and death was too good for the shirker. And with the light I forgot the brute in the man tearing along the dizzy height of the girder to lash a loafer and only remembered that he had risked his life to avenge just one moment stolen from the day's work."

The stem of Collingeford's wine glass snapped between his fingers. "I'm sorry," he said, laying the pieces aside. He smiled a little nervously on the three tense faces before him. "I don't tell that story often. It goes too deep. Not everybody understands. Some people call Wayne no better than a murderer; but I'm not one of them. And Bodsky says there have been a lot of murderers he'd like to take to his club."

"J. Y., there's somebody listening at the door," said the captain. "Been there some time."

J. Y. swung around and threw open the door. He sprang forward and caught Clem in the act of flight. He brought her back into the room and sat down, holding her upright beside him. J. Y. was proud and for a moment Collingeford's presence galled him. "What were you doing, Clem?" he asked.

Clematis was in that degree of embarrassment and disarray which makes lovely youth a shade more lovely. Her brown hair was tumbled about her face and down her back. Her cheeks were flushed and her thin white neck seemed to tremble above the deep red of her slightly yoked frock. Her lips were moist and parted in excitement. She was sixteen and beautiful beyond the reach of hackneyed phrases. The four men fixed their eyes upon her, and she dropped hers. "I was eavesdropping," she said in a voice that was very low but clear.

"Why, Clem!" said J. Y. gravely.

Clem looked around on the four men. She did not seem afraid. Unconsciously they waited for her to go on, and she did. "Mr. Collingeford was telling about Alan. I heard Charley say he was going to. I shall always eavesdrop when anyone tells about Alan."

For a second her auditors were stunned by the audacity. Collingeford's face was the first to light up and his hand came down on the table with a bang. "Bully for you, young 'un!" he cried and his clear laugh could be heard on the lawn. Before it was over, the judge joined in, the captain grunted his merriest grunt and J. Y. patted Clem's shoulder and smiled.

Clem was of the salt of the earth among womankind—the kind that waits to weep till the battle is over and then becomes a thousand times more dear in her weakness. Her big eyes had been welling with tears and now they jumped the barrier just as Nance rushed in and cried, "What are you all laughing at?" Then she caught sight of Clem. From her she looked around on the men. "You four big bulking brutes," she said. "Come to me, Clem, you darling. What have they been doing to you? There, there, don't cry. Men are silly things. What if they did laugh at you?"

Clem was sobbing on Nance's shoulder. "It isn't that," she gasped. "I don't—mind—that! But Mr. Collingeford called me a 'young one.'"

The three gray-heads kept their faces with difficulty. Collingeford leaped to his feet. "My dear young lady—Miss Clematis—" he stammered, "my word, now! I didn't mean it. Swear I didn't. I'll do anything if you'll only stop crying. Do stop and listen to me. I'll grovel."

It took him an hour to make his peace.

CHAPTER XII

Many they were who drank at the fountain of hospitality in Maple House and to all, quiet Mrs. J. Y. held out the measured cup of welcome with impartial hand. But once in a while one came who made the rare appeal to the heart. Such a one was Collingeford. For all his wanderings, his roughing, and his occasional regression to city drawing rooms and ultra-country houses, Collingeford fitted into the Hill—he belonged.

On Sunday night they were gathered on the lawn, all but Clem who sat at the piano beside an open window and poured her girl's voice out over the rippling keys. Her voice was thin and clear like a mountain brook hurrying over pebbles and like the brook it held the promise of coming fullness.

Collingeford sat by Mrs. J. Y., a little apart from the others. They had not talked. Mrs. J. Y. broke a long silence when she said, in a full low voice that somehow seemed related to Clem's thin trill. "We are very quiet here."

Collingeford looked thoughtfully at his glowing cigar end. "The best parts of life are quiet," he answered.

"Do you really like it?" said Mrs. J. Y., almost shyly. "Englishmen of your class generally fall to the lot of our landed and chateauxed."

"My dear Mrs. Wayne," said Collingeford, "I've been sitting here in a really troubled silence trying to think out how to ask you to make it a week for me instead of a week-end."

Mrs. J. Y.'s laugh was happy but low. It did not disturb the others. Collingeford went on. "I know America pretty well for an Englishman. I thought I had done the whole country, from Albuquerque to Newport. But you are right. When we're not roughing it out West, we visiting Englishmen are pretty apt to be rubbing up against the gilded high-lights of the landed and the chateauxed. This"—Collingeford waved his cigar to embrace the whole of Red Hill—"is something new to me—and old. It's the sort of thing Englishmen think of when they are far from home. I have never seen it before in America."

"And yet," said Mrs. J. Y., "there are thousands of quiet homes in America just like it in spirit. In spite of all our divorces—all our national linen-washing in public—our homes are today what they always have been, the backbone of the country. The social world is in turmoil everywhere and America is in the throes no less than England. Our backbone is under a strain and some think it is breaking, but I don't." She turned her soft eyes on Collingeford and smiled. "There," she added, "I have been polemic but one seldom has the chance

Gazed With a Sort of Numbed Emotion.

to spread the good fame of one's country. I am glad you can give us a week instead of a week-end."

Collingeford heard someone speak of Mrs. Lansing and he said to Mrs. J. Y., "I know a Mrs. Lansing—a beautiful and scintillating young person—the sort of effervescence that flies over to Europe and becomes the dismay of our smart women and the fate of many men."

Mrs. J. Y. for a second was puzzled. "That isn't Mrs. Lansing—it's Mrs. Gerry you're thinking of. Mrs. Lansing is her mother-in-law. They live next door."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

"PIP-SQUEAKS" AND "GASPER"

Trench Journals Published by Soldiers Have Names That Are Hard to Understand.

The editors of many of the curious little trench journals, which are being brought out in ever-increasing numbers by soldiers at the front, have a perfect genius for inventing queer and bizarre titles for their publications.

Some of these, though certainly strange-sounding, are at least understandable. The "Pow-Wow," for instance, which is the trench journal of the Twentieth Battalion Royal Fusiliers, conveys some sort of an intelligible idea to most people.

But the same cannot be said of the "Lead-Swinger," which, its subtitle informs us, is "The Bivouac Journal of the Third West Riding Field Ambulance." Is "lead-swinger" Army slang for an ambulance man? Or what?

"Pip-Squeaks" is another puzzling title, until one learns incidentally, on glacing through its inside pages, that "pip-squeak" is a special kind of small German shell, so-called by Tommy from the noise it makes when fired.

The "Comb and Paper" reports and criticizes concerts and other similar entertainments at the front. The "Hangar Herald" presents no difficulties to anyone who knows that "hangar" is the name airmen give to the sheds where their aeroplanes are stored. The paper deals, as its name implies, with the doings of aviators at the front.

The "Gaspar" is a paper published so its editor informs us, "for soldiers at the base," and he goes on to tell us, incidentally, that "the base is a place where troops are kept until they are so fed up that they do not mind getting killed."

Yet another of these curiously named ventures in active service journalism is entitled "Dickey Scrapings," and its substitute, which is at least self-explanatory, even if somewhat diffuse, is as follows: "The Only Authorized Version of the Doings of the Honorable and Ancient Order of the Cooks of the Artists' Rifles."

May Be Longest European War.

It is pointed out that if the war lasts until the autumn of 1916 it will have been longer than any great war in Europe since the fall of Napoleon. Each of the two Balkan wars of 1912-13 was a matter of weeks. So were the Serbo-Bulgarian war of 1885 and the Turco-Greek war of 1897. The Crimean war lasted a little more than a year, while the Franco-Prussian war was practically decided in a month, although Paris was holding out seven months afterward. The Russo-Japanese war lasted about twelve months, as did the Turco-Italian war in 1911-12. The Boer war ran for two and a half years, but that cannot be called a European war. The American Civil war lasted four years.

By Measurement.

For half an hour the teacher patiently instructed her class in the art of telling the time.

"Now," she said at last, as she pointed to the big clock on the wall, "you may be the first to tell me the time.

Full of importance, Mary turned and studied the dial. Then she faced her teacher again, her eyes shining with triumph.

"Please, miss," she said, "it's just one inch past eleven."—Philadelphia Record.

Unable to Reach Bottom.

A miner lowered into a subterranean cavern opened by a miner's blast at Volcano, Nev., some time ago, was unable to discover the ends of the fissure. Stones dropped through the opening could be heard bounding from wall to wall, but there was no sound indicating that they reached the bottom.

Ice-Breaker Carries Passengers.

The ice-breaking ferryboat, Prince Edward Island, plying on the Straits of Northumberland, Canada, has palatial accommodations for passengers. It is the first boat of the kind to be so equipped.

Long Journey to Safety.

Three thousand refugees from the devastated provinces of western Russia arrived in Irkutsk, the capital of Siberia, recently. Some of them had been 12 weeks journeying hither and thither.

There is an excellent market for saws in Russia, as that great country does not manufacture them.

An electric process for drying lumber in piles of unbarked logs has been perfected in France.

Proof of Marriage.

The great detective, laying aside professional cares for the evening, is attending a dance. Introduced to a beautiful woman, he asks her to dance with him, and she graciously consents.

"You have been married several years," he murmurs, after a couple rounds of the floor.

"How could you guess that?" she asks. "I am not wearing my wedding ring. Do I look like a married woman?"

"Not at all," he replies, gallantly. "But I knew you were married the moment we started to dance. You at once began the leading."—Judge.

Important Work to Continue.

The Italian government has placed the zoological station at Naples under the control of a royal commission, of which F. Sav. Monticello, professor of zoology in the University of Naples, is president. The commission announces that it will supply means to continue the work of the station, and engagements entered into in regard to tables for research.

Endless.

"Paw, what's the longest period of time?"

"From one pay day to the next."—Buffalo Express.

His Query.

"Darling, the furnace fire is out."

"Has that thing got the moving picture show habit, too?"